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ABSTRACT

Developmental theories, especially the moral development theory of Lawrence Kohlberg, can enhance the teaching of adolescent literature. Expanding on J. Piaget's model of moral development, Kohlberg's model consists of three levels--preconventional, conventional, and postconventional--subdivided into six stages: (1) punishment and obedience, (2) instrumental exchange, (3) interpersonal conformity, (4) social system and conscience maintenance, (5) prior rights and social contract, and (6) universal ethical principles. To use Kohlberg's theory in literature classes, teachers should match literature assignments to student levels of moral development. They should also consider the moral aspects of the literature to be used in the classroom, ideally following a developmental sequence of moral complexity. Within a larger context, English teachers can relate moral issues in fiction and nonfiction to actual moral dilemmas faced by students and to world events. Combatting censorship attempts is also a moral imperative for the teacher that goes beyond the classroom and perhaps even beyond the school. (JL)

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YOUNG ADULT FICTION: A MORAL DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE

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This year's conference theme, "Fostering Creativity in the Teaching of English," lends itself naturally to one of my favorite cross-disciplinary combinations, that of developmental theory from psychology and education and the teaching of literature in the English classroom. My interest in these two fields comes from my own academic background as both major and teacher in English and psychological foundations of education, the latter with a focus on human development, or what is now often called lifespan development. On many occasions I have integrated selections from literature into my developmental courses in order to better illustrate various stages of development and maturation, and today I hope to suggest that English literature classes might benefit from the reverse of this approach. "The child is father of the man" from Wordsworth, Shakespeare's "seven ages of man," and a host of examples from Dickens, Joyce, Frost, and more recent writers such as Updike, Salinger, and Knowles, have all helped my students in child and lifespan development classes see the transitions of growing up and adulthood more clearly. Now I would like to discuss the way developmental theories, especially the moral development theory of Lawrence Kohlberg, can enhance the teaching of literature for adolescents.

Kohlberg's model of moral development (see handout on "Stages of Moral Development - Kohlberg") derives most directly from the earlier work of Dewey (1909) and Piaget (1932). Piaget's work on children's moral development has been overshadowed by his widely-

known work in the area of cognitive development. Through careful observation of children at play in neighborhood games such as marbles and through open-ended interviews of children about the rules of their games and about their understanding of intentionality in the actions of other children, Piaget proposed a developmental sequence in moral reasoning from what he called a "Morality of Constraint" to a "Morality of Cooperation." The movement he described was similar to that of his cognitive developmental stages (Flavell, 1963), which he called Sensorimotor, Preoperational, Concrete Operations, and Formal Operations. In these four stages of cognitive development, Piaget described the typical mental operations of infants, preschoolers, children, and the adolescent to adult period. One primary change in these periods is a movement from egocentrism toward perspectivism. In moral development, Piaget contrasted the early heteronomous morality with the later autonomous mode of operation. Progression in moral development comes not just from adults (who have much of the power or "constraint"), but from interaction with peers as well. In fact, answers from adults to children's questions which are given too quickly may actually suppress the natural curiosity and open-ended thinking of children. Piaget's understanding of how children become mature moral reasoners focuses on an Interactional model of inner and outer influences, an interesting divergence from the two predominant schools of psychology, the Psychoanalytic, focusing on inner drives, and

the Behavioristic, focusing on external conditioning.

Kohlberg (1981), in expanding Piaget's model, described his stages briefly, as follows:

Stage 1 - Punishment and obedience
Stage 2 - Instrumental exchange
Stage 3 - Interpersonal conformity
Stage 4 - Social system and conscience maintenance
Stage 5 - Prior rights and social contract
Stage 6 - Universal ethical principles (p.xxviii)

The six stages are subdivisions of three levels of moral development. Stages 1 and 2 make up the Preconventional level, where the individual has an absolute view of rules and power and sees himself as the center of all decisions; Stages 3 and 4 make up the Conventional level, where group needs and the social system are considered most important, and Stages 5 and 6 make up the Postconventional level, where underlying principles of justice and ethics are primary. The basic assumptions of Kohlberg's theory (1976) are that 1.) moral development has a cognitive-developmental or moral judgment component; 2.) the basic motivation for moral behavior is the generalized motivation for acceptance, competence, self-esteem or self realization rather than the meeting of biological needs or the reduction of anxiety and fear; 3.) the major aspects of moral development are culturally universal; 4.) basic moral norms and principles are stuctures arising through experiences of rules existing outside the person, interaction of the individual with others forming the basis of this stage structure; and 5.) environmental influences on moral development are more the result of general

quality and extent of cognitive and social stimulation throughout the individual's development than specific experiences with parents or specific discipline methods or rewards and punishments (p.41)

The methodology for assessing moral maturity is the open-ended "clinical" interview, an example of which we see in "Mr. Peterson's Dilemma" (Teacher Training in Values Education: A Workshop, Tape 1). Mr. Peterson is a high school social studies teacher who is known for his good rapport with students and his excellent teaching. One day his students approach him with their idea to boycott the school cafeteria because the school board and cafeteria workers have refused to see the plight of the migrant farm workers and have continued to buy nonunion lettuce for the cafeteria. The students remind Mr. Peterson that their boycott is "all in the spirit of American protest -- just like you taught us!" Only about one-fourth of the students in the school have actually signed the petition protesting the buying policies, however, and Mr. Peterson is also well aware of the provision in his contract which requires him to report to the principal any activity which might disrupt the school. He discusses the implications of the proposed boycott with these students, but they say they are determined to go through with their plans. Mr. Peterson's dilemma is whether to report to the school administration the impending boycott and picket line, and respondents to this initial question

are asked to tell the reasons why or why not in addition to their positive or negative response. A moral dilemma such as this forces the respondent to choose among competing claims. Mr. Peterson, for instance, values the confidence the students have placed in him, but he also feels bound by his agreement to the terms of his contract.

A better-known and frequently referenced moral dilemma is that of a man called Heinz, whose wife is dying of a serious illness for which only one drug offers hope of cure. This drug is being made by a greedy druggist in a private laboratory, and he refuses to sell the drug for less then $2000 per dose. When Heinz becomes desperate after unsuccessfully trying to borrow the money, he considers stealing the drug to save his wife. The issues explored in the probing questions focus on life versus law, justice, punishment, obedience, and conscience. The overall moral reasoning processes expressed in the various moral judgmental statements that a person makes combine to place him at a particular developmental stage. Usually about 50 percent of a person's moral judgments are made at this stage, with about 25 percent at each of the contiguous stages.

Some typical reasons given for Mr. Peterson to tell or not tell the administration in his dilemma are "No, he might lose his job" (Stage 1), "Yes, because the administration will see his leadership ability and make him an assistant principal" (Stage 2), "No, because he has a position of responsibility and an obligation

to the school rules (Stage 4), and "No, because the students have a right to demonstrate against what they consider an injustice as long as there is no clear danger to others in the school and as long as they are willing to pay the penalty for their actions" (Stage 5). For each "Yes" or "No" answer at a given stage, there is a comparable opposite answer with reasoning processes at the same level of maturity. There should be potential for much discussion among advocates of different positions and reasons, and this moral discussion format is one of the major ways Kohlberg sees movement through the stages occurring within the school setting. Individuals understand their own stage of reasoning and all of those they have passed through (which they now generally reject), and they also understand but do not yet fully accept the reasoning one stage above their own. Beyond that, they may merely be confused by the reasoning processes two or more stages above theirs (Kohlberg, 1975). With the possibilities for these moral discussions in mind, I would like to turn now to specific ways English teachers may make use of Kohlberg's theory in literature classes.

First, a teacher should understand and informally diagnose student levels of moral development in order to match literature assignments to their needs. Few teachers would have time to conduct an extensive interview with each student to determine a stage of moral maturity; however, from statements made by students in their speech or written compositions, teachers can

develop an intuitive feeling for the predominant stages among class members. In my own research on disruptive and non-disruptive students (Hiett, 1977), I found Stage 2 to be the predominant stage for eighthgraders, although some were moving substantially into Stage 3 and others still had large amounts of Stage 1 elements in their thinking. By high school, we hope to see the emergence of Stage 3 reasoning for most students, and the more mature ones will advance toward Stage 4, with a less mature group remaining at Stage 2. Huckleberry Finn is a good example of a book which explores development from Stage 2 to Stage 3. A particularly revealing personal exploration of Stage 2 thinking is found in Huck's thoughts as he and Jim float down the Mississippi:

> They went off and I got aboard the raft, feeling bad and low, because I knowed very well I had done wrong, and I see it warn't no use for me to try to learn to do right; a body that don't get started right when he's little ain't got no show--when the pinch comes there ain't nothing to back him up and keep him to his work, and so he gets beat. Then I thought a minute, and says to myself, hold on; s'pose you'd 'a' done right and give Jim up, would you felt better than what you do now? No, says I, I'd feel bad--I'd feel just the same way I do now. Well, then, says I, what's the use you learning to do right when it's troublesome to do right and ain't no trouble to do wrong, and the wages is just the same? I was stuck. I couldn't answer that. So I reckon I wouldn't bother no more about it, but after this always do whichever come handiest at the time. (Twain, Huckleberry Finn, The Easton Press, 1981, p.116)

In this revealing monologue, Huck concludes that the right must be what serves him best at the time, a clear Stage 2 perspective, but by the end of the book, he has wrestled back and forth many times between this and the Stage 3 concern for the adults who try

to help him. Of course, there is a higher moral stage being addressed satirically by Twain throughout the book in the theme of the inequality of races, but a full understanding of this perspective would be appreciated more by older readers (college level, for instance).

Second, English teachers should consider the moral aspects of the literature to be used in classrooms. This can be done concurrently with the consideration of student moral stages and matching moral stages of fictional characters. Moral themes, moral reasoning issues, and the moral development levels of characters should all be considered when analyzing literature to be studied. If possible, a developmental sequence should be followed in the moral complexity of the materials used. That is, within a year's curriculum or throughout the junior high and high school curriculum, a progressively more indepth analysis of moral issues should be sought. This can be done using Kohlberg's stages as a basis. Rosenzweig and Harris (1977) developed a curriculum for the Carnegie-Mellon University Education Center English course which utilized a cognitive-moral approach to the teaching of literature. The first year of this civic education English program includes four units of study which move upward through the stages of moral development. Unit I deals with animals in fable and allegory, as in the works of Aesop and Thurber, with Stage 2-3 explorations of societal attitudes and cliches about group behavior as a focus. Unit II on the family

moves from these concerns to more solid Stage 3 issues of trust and affection analogous to problems students have in their own lives. Selections like Gigi by Collete, "Almost a Man" by Wright, "Eveline" by Joyce, Roethke's poem, "My Papa's Waltz," and Sandburg's "What Shall He Tell That Son" are used to develop this stage. Unit III moves to a societal perspective with literature that explores the general organizational aspects of society, such as Golding's Lord of the Flies, Barrie's The Admirable Crichton, Shaw's Pygmalion (all involving Stage 4 societal maintenance questions) and short stories such as Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery," Frank Rooney's "Cyclist Raid," O.Henry's "After Twenty Years," and war poems of Thomas Hardy and Stephen Crane, all dealing with Stages 3-4 authority conflicts. Unit IV deals with the individual's relationship to organization in the community or society, probing moral levels as high as Stage 5, with issues and questions involving law, civil disobedience, and principled actions that violate unjust laws. Among the works chosen for this unit are Billy Budd, a play based on Melville's novel, Anouilh's Antigone, Howard Fast's The Hessian, Ibsen's An Enemy of the People, Orwell's essay on Ghandi, and selections from Spoon River Anthology. This one-year literature program was built around a moral development theme, but many other works typically used in English classrooms can be analyzed for the moral stages they represent through characterization or overall theme. Among these are Knowles' A Separate Peace, where the friendship of Gene and Finny can often

be seen in terms of a Stage 2-3 transition, but where overtones of Stages 4 and 5 are also played out, Harper Lee's To Kill a Mockingbird, where the father consistently thinks and acts from Stage 5 principled perspective but can still talk to Scout and her brother at a Stage 3 level they can comprehend, and Dostoevski's Crime and Punishment, a classical example of Stage 4 and 5 issues of law, justice, and individual rights. When moral themes and levels in literature have been identified, teachers can plan moral discussions around the issues raised by these and the conflicts and characters in the stories.

Within the larger school context, English teachers can relate moral issues in fiction and nonfiction to actual moral dilemmas faced by students and to current world events. When Kohlberg speaks of his "just community" concept in schools, he is taking the moral aspects of schooling beyond the curriculum. The atmosphere of the school should be one of participatory democracy in order for growth in moral development to be most favorable. Addressing the whole school program from a moral development perspective can also be done through creating interdisciplinary links among different subject areas, such as social studies and English, using moral development issues as a basis. Analyzing nonfiction works like King's Letter from a Birmingham Jail or comparing fictional accounts of actual historical events with journals or documentaries of the time would be examples of this approach. Fictional accounts from different moral perspectives,

such as a comparison of Uncle Tom's Cabin and Gone with the Wind, would also make a meaningful moral comparison relevant to real life.

Another moral aspect of the teacher's role which goes beyond the classroom and sometimes beyond the school has to do with combatting censorship attempts when they occur (Jenkinson, 1982). A recent successful attempt to ban Anne Frank's Diary of a Young Girl from English classes in one school system was widely publicized. The material found to be objectionable had to do with brief references by Anne to her menstrual cycle and to the male anatomy. Suggestions were made that these references were too mature for the adolescent readers, but an English teacher schooled in moral development theory might be able to mediate discussions about such materials by pointing out the consistent moral maturity of Anne. At 13 and 14 years of age, she is a strong Stage 3 reasoner, with a grasp of Stage 4 as well. Rarely does she get bogged down in more egocentric Stage 2 concerns, and when she does, she often reasons with herself in the diary, chiding her own immaturity. The moral processes in the book clearly take precedence over the content. We can also see this book's overall theme dealing with even higher moral issues of human rights and justice. While some censors would still be determined, the moral development approach at least provides a way of honestly analyzing potentially objectionable material. Works of literature should be assessed as to whether they deal honestly with moral issues and whether moral reasoning levels of characters are realistic.

Where possible, it would even be interesting to compare different writers in regard to whether they consciously try to deal with moral issues in their writing. This might be done through studying biographies of well-known authors.

I have tried to present some ways that I feel developmental theory and literature in English classrooms can be related. In deciding whether this approach might work for you, you might wish to consider the following questions:

1. Should English teachers deal actively with moral development in literature?
2. Do the "classics" present more highly developed moral issues and themes than other literature, such as popular adolescent literature today?
3. Should teachers be concerned about cognitive and moral development levels of students they teach? Should this influence the choice of materials?
4. Is Kohlberg's moral development framework realistic to you? Do you agree with the sequence of stages he has developed; e.g., that the higher stages are more desirable than the lower ones?
5. At what moral development levels would you classify the ideas and characters in the following works: Nancy Drew/Hardy Boys mysteries; Gone with the Wind; Animal Farm; Sounder; The Little Prince; Alas Babylon; The Pigman; Killing Mr. Griffin; Siddhartha; The Scarlet Letter; A Tree Grows in Brooklyn; Moby Dick; Catch-22; Ivanhoe?

If your response to these questions is generally positive, or if the ideas interest you, then the analysis and teaching of literature from a moral development perspective may be productive for you.

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